

When to use a quotation, paraphrase, or summary

[**Note:** This choice also varies by discipline. **Literature and History** (English, American History) love quotations; **social sciences** (Business, Psychology, Education) like some quotations (often very short); **hard sciences** (Chemistry, Biology, Physics) uses quotations sparingly or not at all.]

Quotation

The exact words of someone else. Always in quotation marks (“ ”) or indented five spaces (5) on left and right. Quotations ALWAYS require a citation. This option is frequently rejected in scientific writing as too specific.

Three reasons to use a Quotation instead of paraphrase or summary:

- The statement is controversial. You need to unpack what it is saying after you quote it.
- The statement shows an expert is agreeing (or disagreeing) with your argument. Now you must show how the quotation is an agreement or disagreement. [not a compelling reason for science]
- The language of the quotation is particularly apt. You may still need to restate what was said in your own words.

For all these reasons a quotation almost never stands alone. You have dropped your “voice” in the essay and need to regain it after the quotation and integrate the quotation ideas back into your argument. A quotation disrupts your argument.

Example: “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.” Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1811)

APA: “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.” (Austen, 1811, p. 1)

MLA: “It is a truth universally acknowledged,” writes Jane Austen in her novel *Pride and Prejudice*, “that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife” (1).

Paraphrase

The exact **idea** of someone else, written in your voice, using your words. It is almost always at least as long if not longer than the original. It is not just replacing random words, but a re-telling of the information. A paraphrase slows the reader down. Like a quotation, it ALWAYS requires a citation.

Benefit: Your voice and wording remain primary; your argument remains clear.

APA: Marriage was such a normative structure at the turn of the 19th C, that Jane Austen (1811) could posit it as a given at the beginning of her novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, that single males with some economic stability needed to marry (p. 1).

MLA: While it is presented as a given truth by the narrator at the beginning of *Pride and Prejudice*, the pronouncement that a well-off male in society is in need of match-making help is clearly the position of Mrs. Bennet (Austen 1).

Summary

Mostly the exact idea of someone else written in your voice, using your words, but more concisely. It is always shorter than the original. Again, like a paraphrase, the summary puts the idea not only in your words but often ties it back into your argument. A summary speeds the reader up and pushes her/him on. For a summary, as long as you do not switch sources, you can often put a citation only at the end of a paragraph. In fact, if a direct quotation from that source or a paraphrase from that source is cited anywhere in the paragraph, and you don't switch sources, you can often omit the citation at the end (as long as it is clear that you are summarizing that same source). This helps keep your paper from overflowing with citations.

Benefit: You get the point in but keep the focus on your argument and move things along.

APA: Marriage was such an economic norm at the turn of the 19th C, that Jane Austen (1811) could posit it as a given at the beginning of her novel, *Pride and Prejudice* (p. 1).

MLA: While Jane Austen puts her assessment of marriage as an economic norm in the mouth of the narrator at the beginning of *Pride and Prejudice*, the position stated is clearly that of Mrs. Bennet (1).